



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

BOBBY JINDAL
GOVERNOR

HAROLD LEGGETT, Ph.D.
SECRETARY

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Contact: Tim Beckstrom
Telephone: 225.219.3967

Harvey man arrested for fraud pertaining to waste tire program

BATON ROUGE – Today, investigators within the Criminal Investigation Division of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality arrested a waste tire transporter from Harvey on six felony counts of submitting documents containing false certifications to the department.

“The criminal investigation and arrest for fraudulent activity in the tire program ensures DEQ is committed to a level playing field for the waste tire program stakeholders who follow the rules and regulations,” said Vince Sagnibene, DEQ Undersecretary and head of the division that manages the Waste Tire Fund. “We take fraud seriously because it creates an unfair business environment and is costly to Louisiana’s taxpayers. Over the years, the Waste Tire Fund has been beneficial to the state. We’ve seen millions of tires processed, recycled and disposed of properly. If the state is to continue to see these benefits, the fund must be run efficiently and free of any fraudulent business practices.”

Mercury Forges, 39, is alleged to have submitted documents to DEQ that contained false certifications on the amounts of eligible waste tires he collected and transported. Under Louisiana law, tire dealerships have the responsibility to register with the department and collect a fee for each tire that is replaced on a vehicle. Once the fee is collected, the tire becomes an eligible tire and the money collected is placed into the department's waste tire fund. This fund is used to reimburse waste tire processors for converting the eligible waste tires into usable material that is approved for a beneficial end-use market. The collection, transportation and processing of eligible waste tires is regulated utilizing a manifest system.

According to the information gathered throughout the investigation, Forges was allegedly collecting eligible waste tires from authorized generators, culling and selling these eligible tires to used tire retailers and replacing them with ineligible tires. Forges failed to record this activity on the waste tire manifests that were submitted to the department.

“Our investigation has shown he laundered ineligible tires into the waste tire program which undermines the financial stability of the waste tire fund,” said Todd Compton, DEQ CID Criminal Investigator.

Forges was primarily operating in the New Orleans area. However, because the false manifests were submitted to DEQ in Baton Rouge, he was charged and booked in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Filing false public records containing a false representation of material fact is a felony under Title 14 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes. If convicted of the crime of filing false public records, Forges faces possible imprisonment for not more than five years with or without hard labor, or a fine of not more than \$5 thousand, or both.

An arrest does not constitute guilt in a criminal case. All evidence compiled during the investigation is presented to the area prosecutors who determine if formal charges are warranted.